DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 346 JC 980 294

AUTHOR Robinson, Kerry
TITLE Using Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) as an Alternative to Mid-Course Questionnaires: Practical Guidelines for Instructors and Facilitators.
INSTITUTION Aurora Coll., Fort Smith (Northwest Territories).
PUB DATE 1995-05-00
NOTE 14p.; For the "Formative Feedback Strategy" guidelines, see JC 980 295.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; College Faculty; Community Colleges; Evaluation Methods; Faculty Development; Foreign Countries; *Formative Evaluation; Instructional Effectiveness; *Instructional Improvement; Models; *Small Group Instruction; Student Attitudes; Student Centered Curriculum; *Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; Teacher Effectiveness; Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods; Teaching Skills; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

The Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) method was originally designed in 1976 by D. Joseph Clark to obtain formative feedback from students and help improve course quality and teacher effectiveness. In the SGIF method, a facilitator meets with students, gathers feedback on an instructor's performance, and reviews these students' comments, privately, with the instructor. This document provides a detailed set of guidelines for instructors and facilitators who wish to implement the SGIF method, which consists of five steps: (1) preparation; (2) conducting the SGIF session; (3) facilitator/instructor meetings to discuss student feedback; (4) instructor acknowledgement of feedback; and (5) follow-up meeting between facilitator and instructor. The benefits of SGIF, compared with questionnaire use, are discussed, and experience necessary to facilitators and instructors are described. A sample SGIF form is appended. Contains 10 references. (EMH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 420 346

Using

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTIONAL FEEDBACK (SGIF)

As an alternative to mid-course questionnaires:

Practical guidelines for instructors and facilitators

Kerry Robinson
Senior Instructor
Observer/Communicator Training Program
Aurora College, Thebacha Campus
Fort Smith, NWT
(May, 1995)

IC980294

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY:
T. Gauthier
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Introduction

The Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF)[1] method was originally designed in 1976 by D. Joseph Clark (Clark, 1982, p.2). The purpose of the SGIF method is to obtain formative feedback from students so that the instructor can improve the course and his or her ability to facilitate learning. Briefly described, the SGIF method involves an instructor arranging the services of a facilitator, who in turn meets with the instructor's students in an effort to gather feedback on the instructor's performance and the course in general. The facilitator then meets privately with the instructor to review the feedback received from the students. One reason for the appeal of the SGIF method is related to students' frustrations with repeatedly filling out the same mid-course and end-of-course questionnaires for each instructor (Abbott, Wulff, Nyquist, Ropp, & Hess, 1990, p. 201). It is not surprising, then, that research has shown the SGIF method to be an effective alternative to mid-course questionnaires (Newby, Sherman, & Coffman, 1991).

Purpose

The purpose of this package is to provide a detailed set of guidelines for those persons interested in facilitating SGIF sessions as well as a list of benefits and expected outcomes for those instructors wishing to receive feedback through the SGIF process.

Though literature on SGIF stresses that facilitators must be "trained" prior to conducting SGIF sessions (Clark, 1982, p. 4; Clark & Redmond, 1982, p. 1; Weimer, 1990, p. 108), I believe that community colleges, universities, and many other institutions or agencies involved in the education or training of adults have available personnel capable of becoming successful SGIF facilitators without incurring the cost of the expensive workshops and/or video tapes recommended by Clark (1982, p.4) and others. While there are important and essential prerequisite skills and qualities that every SGIF facilitator should possess (see pages 8 and 9 in this package), the SGIF method need not be restricted to those individuals who are formally trained by 'experts' in the process. In fact, Kort (1992), in an article discussing a variety of strategies related to faculty development and the learner-centered classroom, noted that "SGIF is the simplest of the activities [she] proposes (p.69)."

---

[1]This method is known both as Small Group Instructional Diagnosis (SGID) and Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF). I prefer the latter title as it sounds less 'clinical' and also emphasises the single most important aspect of the process -- receiving and acting on feedback from learners.

The Participants

Before explaining the SGIF process in detail, it is important to identify and clarify the roles of the participants.

(1) **instructor** refers to the course professor, teacher, facilitator, trainer, or tutor.

(2) **facilitator** refers to the person conducting the feedback session with the students.

(3) **student(s)** refers to the learners participating in the course.

The Process

If one follows Clark's (1982, p. 4) recommendations, the SGIF will consist of five steps.

Step 1 - Preparation

(A) The instructor seeks the services of a facilitator (usually another instructor) to act as an intermediary in obtaining feedback from the learners. (Pages 8 and 9 of this package provide a list of recommended prerequisite skills for SGIF facilitators.) Regarding the timing for an SGIF session, most practitioners suggest that the SGIF take place at mid-term (Bennett, 1988, p. 3). However, this time-frame may have been chosen because it was administratively convenient for universities to conduct formative feedback activities close to the mid-term break, and not because it was the most strategic time to conduct a formative evaluation. I suggest conducting an SGIF one-third of the way into a course would be more productive because the students will have formed opinions on their experiences by this point and such timing would enable the instructor to make relevant changes sooner.

(B) The next step has the instructor meeting with the facilitator in order to discuss which questions the students will be asked. While most practitioners agree that three questions should be asked (Bennett, 1988; Clark, 1982), there is little agreement on what the specific focus of these three questions should be. Below are three sets of questions, each with a different focus implied:

(i) Clark's (1982, p.4) questions focus on the course in general:

(1) What do you like about the course?
(2) What do you think needs improvement?
(3) What suggestions do you have for bringing about these improvements?

(ii) Bennett's (1988, p.3) questions focus on the students' individual learning styles and needs:

(1) What helps you learn?
(2) What does not help?
(3) What do you suggest to improve your learning?

(iii) Based on a concern to focus on improving instructional skills and instructor/student interactions, I propose a third set of questions:

(1) What are the instructor's major facilitation/ presentation strengths?
(2) What areas of facilitation/presentation need improvement?
(3) What suggestions do you have for making the improvements noted above?

Because all three sets of questions are valuable in their own right, I suggest that Bennett's three questions on 'learning' not be presented to the students during the SGIF; rather, that these questions, or a revised and more specific form of these questions, be addressed on orientation day by using a one-page questionnaire. This method would not only demonstrate to the learners that the instructor is interested in their individual learning differences and preferences, it would also suggest that the instructor is interested in knowing this information **prior** to engaging the course content. Regarding the six remaining questions, I suggest they all be included in the SGIF, thus feedback on course design and implementation as well as feedback on instructional issues can be received in one session (see Appendix 'A' for a copy of the questions).

(C) A day or two before the SGIF session, the instructor should advise the students that a colleague will be coming to obtain some feedback. The learners should be advised that the purpose of the feedback session will be to improve the course and the instructor's ability to facilitate their learning. It should be emphasised that both the instructor **and** the students will benefit from the session.

Step 2 - Conducting the SGIF session

(A) On the day of the SGIF session, the instructor should introduce his or her colleague to the class and then leave the classroom. The facilitator should then explain the process listed below (B, C, & D) to the students. The facilitator should also advise the class that any individual comments will be anonymous -- the instructor will not be told who initiated any particular comment. The facilitator should also advise the students that the SGIF session will not be used in the instructor's performance evaluation, nor will the results be given to the instructor's supervisor.

(B) The students will be broken up into small groups and asked to make comments on six specific questions (see Appendix 'A'). The size of the groups will depend on the total number of students in the class. Two to six students per group is usually manageable. This activity should take 10 to 15 minutes.

(C) The students will then rejoin as one group and the facilitator will ask the groups to report on each question. The facilitator will try to obtain a consensus where possible, and to seek clarification where necessary. As Redmond (1982) notes, "the facilitator must also be sensitive to dissension and minority reporting (p. 4)." As opposed to recording responses on the chalkboard, the feedback should be recorded on one or two flip-charts so that the facilitator can have a record of the responses.

Though the nature of feedback will vary from class to class, a large scale research project (Newby, Sherman, & Coffman, 1991, pp. 4-5) found that most feedback falls into one of seven major categories: Instructor (or Instruction), Learner Interaction, Media, Content, Printed Material, Grading, and Course Policy. Conducting this part of step 2 usually takes 15 to 30 minutes, depending on factors such as class size, the extent of diverse opinions, how much clarifying of the feedback is required, etc.

(D) When recording of the feedback is completed, the facilitator shall advise the learners that he or she will report back to the instructor at the end of the day.

Step 3 - Facilitator and instructor meet to discuss feedback

As soon as practicable, the facilitator should meet with the instructor to discuss the feedback session. The facilitator should provide the instructor with a typed summary of the feedback. The facilitator must ensure that all comments

made by specific students remain anonymous. The facilitator can (and should), however, provide the instructor with a general idea of the level of concern on each issue (e.g., "most of the students felt . . ." "a few students expressed a concern about . . ." "about half of the students . . ." etc.).

The extent of the facilitator/instructor discussion will depend on the relationship between the two parties and the experience of the facilitator. An experienced facilitator should not only be able to effectively relay the student feedback to the instructor, he or she should also be able to provide suggestions for dealing with issues or concerns arising from the SGIF. Kort (1992) notes that one of the benefits of the SGIF is that "instructors can learn from both their colleagues and their students (p. 69)." The skill required in this role is sensing whether the instructor is open to suggestions for dealing with concerns arising from the feedback, or whether the instructor prefers to deal with the feedback on his or her own.

Step 4 - Instructor acknowledges receipt of feedback

Though step 3 has been identified as the most difficult one (Clark, 1982, p.4; Redmond, 1982, p.5), I believe that step 4 has the greatest potential for confrontation if not handled properly. While the instructor should address the students and acknowledge the feedback received, he or she must be careful not to reopen the SGIF session. Walking this fine line between **addressing** the feedback and **redressing** the feedback can be difficult.

My perception has been that discussion about the feedback should be limited. However, research has indicated that "students were more satisfied with an extended instructor response that went beyond simple acknowledgement of having received student feedback to more directly address[ing] the specific content of the feedback (Abbott, Wulff, Nyquist, Ropp, & Hess, 1990, p. 204-205)." Clark (1982) offers further support against my position to limit discussion on the feedback; he recommends that the instructor use "10 minutes of the ensuing class period to get clarification from students about comments that were unclear (p. 4)."

I have two points of disagreement with Clark's strategy. First, if the facilitator did a thorough job, there should be no points which remain unclear. One of the primary purposes of having a facilitator (as opposed to using a questionnaire) is to clarify and confirm the nature of the feedback that the instructor will eventually receive. Second, anonymity and a willingness to express concerns to a person other than the instructor are two particular components of the SGIF session that make it successful. Anything that might be perceived by the students as an attempt to reopen or make enquiries regarding specific comments or

concerns may serve to undermine the effectiveness of the SGIF process. This is especially true if the instructor becomes defensive about certain concerns.

Ultimately, the decision lies with the instructor regarding the extent that he or she wishes to acknowledge the feedback. As an instructor, my personal preference is to "briefly" acknowledge receipt of the feedback. I do believe, however, that it is very important to outline those things which cannot be changed for the course in question.

Example:

> "I met with Dave yesterday and he advised me of the outcome of your feedback session. I appreciate the comments and I will try to incorporate your feedback. I agree that we need more cloud manuals, so I have ordered six more. However, they won't arrive until after this course."

Step 5 - Follow-up meeting between facilitator and instructor

Though Clark (1982, p.4) defines this as the final step in the SGIF process, Redmond (1982, p.6) acknowledges that this step is seldom performed. I concur with Redmond, as it has been my experience that step 4 usually ends the SGIF. I would, however, recommend a follow-up meeting if the facilitator and/or the instructor believe one to be necessary, or if the instructor has limited experience. For an inexperienced instructor, such a meeting could serve to establish a supportive relationship in which the instructor can freely discuss his or her success in acting upon the feedback received through the SGIF. An experienced facilitator may also be able to diagnose why certain attempts to make changes might have been unsuccessful for the instructor. Bennett (1987), on the other hand, totally disagrees with the inclusion of step five; he believes that "it inappropriately shifts the responsibility for improving instruction from the instructor to the facilitator (p. 103)." In light of the disagreement among practitioners, the decision on whether on not to include step five should lie with the instructor and the facilitator.

The benefits of SGIF when compared to using questionnaires

It is difficult to separate the benefits of SGIF for instructors from the benefits of SGIF for learners, as most feedback that helps instructors also helps learners. Following is a list of benefits I have noted, as well as some benefits noted by others.

(1) An SGIF facilitator can seek elaboration or clarification of feedback points prior to reporting to the instructor. When an anonymous questionnaire is used, comments that require clarification cannot be redressed.

(2) The presence of a third party to solicit feedback emphasizes to the learners that their input is indeed valued by the instructor.

(3) In my experience, learners are sometimes reluctant to provide direct or indirect (e.g., through a questionnaire) feedback to the same instructor who will eventually grade them. Consequently, feedback tends to be more plentiful and candid when an intermediary is used. On a related point, confidentiality and anonymity of the SGIF method tends to illicit more constructive feedback. In short, if the students have serious concerns, you are more likely to hear about them through an SGIF session than through mid-course surveys.

(4) Most adult learners know that there is nothing "**anonymous**" about an anonymous survey! Anonymity is especially jeopardized in small classes. However, when the SGIF method is used, true anonymity can be achieved.

(5) The SGIF facilitator, as a neutral party, is often in a better position than the students to relay valid points of constructive feedback to the instructor. It is an unfortunate truth that some (not all) instructors place a higher value on feedback relayed through a peer than on feedback received from students directly.

(6) The SGIF experience can positively affect students. According to Redmond (1982), a survey of SGIF participants found "a significant positive change in student attitude towards the instructor, student attitude towards the course, overall morale, and student motivation (p. 7)."

(7) Bennett (1988) provides three incidental benefits for the students arising from using the SGIF method: "(1) Students enjoy being consulted. (2) The process catapults them into active participation in their own education -- for the first time in some instances. (3) Most importantly, students enjoy thinking together seriously (p. 4)."

(8) Weimer (1990) notes that SGIF sessions "help students develop the kind of instructional awareness that will enable them to understand experiences in other classes better and help them learn to express criticisms of teaching constructively (pp. 107-108)."

(9) One of the best reasons for conducting SGIF sessions may simply be because students prefer it. Wulff, Staton-Spicer, Hess, and Nyquist (1985) note that "students prefer the SGIF over end-of-quarter student ratings because of the timing, quality of feedback, oral exchange of information and personal exchange involved in the SGIF (p. 43)."

Arranging an SGIF session for your next course

If this package has peaked your interest regarding the possible benefits of the SGIF method, then the best way to gain a better understanding of the process and its usefulness is by experiencing the method from the perspective of an instructor. If you cannot find a colleague experienced in using the SGIF method, then I suggest you consider reviewing this package with a knowledgeable, experienced, and respected colleague to see if he or she is willing to conduct an SGIF session for your class.

Would you like to facilitate SGIF sessions?

If you are considering becoming an SGIF facilitator for one or more of your colleagues, you should first experience the process as an instructor. Though you will not get to see the student feedback session from this perspective, you will come to appreciate the value of the facilitator/instructor pre- and post-feedback sessions (steps 1 and 3). You will also be able gain an understanding of the variety of feedback that emerges from SGIF sessions.

If, after experiencing the SGIF process as an instructor, you feel that you would like to facilitate SGIF sessions, you should have prerequisite knowledge and experience in at least three specific areas: (1) effective instructional techniques and strategies for facilitating learning; (2) giving, receiving, and soliciting feedback; and (3) working effectively with small groups.

As feedback is at the core of the SGIF process, it is understandable that every facilitator have extensive experience and a clear understanding of the accepted practices related to giving, receiving, and soliciting feedback in a learning environment. It has been my experience that many persons with training in counselling or social work are especially skilful and sensitive in this area.

The SGIF facilitator should also have experience working in small groups (or buzz groups), particularity in situations where the groups examined issues, addressed questions, or attempted to solve a problem. Having worked with small

groups, the facilitator will no doubt have experienced dealing with dominant groups, dominant individuals within a group, and will have noticed the tendency for more assertive individuals to occasionally sway group opinion. Seeking clarification within a group, or asking for a rotation of group reporters, are both effective ways of bringing out the feedback of less assertive individuals and ensuring maximum participation for all the students.

Knowledge of effective instructional techniques and knowledge of the various theories and practices related to facilitating adult learning are also important prerequisites for an SGIF facilitator. These skills are especially needed when the facilitator is working with new or inexperienced instructors, as in these cases the instructor will often look to the facilitator for guidance and suggestions regarding what action to take in light of the feedback received. When the students report on instructional or learning issues, a knowledgeable and experienced facilitator should be able to ask the kind of probing questions that will turn general feedback into specific feedback, and vague comments into concrete observations. Abbott, Wulff, Nyquist, Ropp, & Hess (1990) explain the role concisely: "the facilitator collects and summarizes the groups' ideas, clarifying until the groups are satisfied that the facilitator clearly understands the information being reported (p. 201)." So, before completing the feedback session with the students, the facilitator should be confident that he or she will be able to clearly and correctly articulate the feedback to the instructor.

Reflection on your skills in the three areas identified above -- giving and receiving feedback, working with small groups, and knowledge of effective instructional and facilitating techniques -- will give you some sense of whether you have the knowledge and experience to conduct SGIF sessions. If you are interested in facilitating an SGIF session, but feel that you lack sufficient knowledge in one or more of the areas described above, there are volumes of books and journal articles available which are specifically dedicated to each specific area.

Concluding Remarks

It is my hope that the SGIF process has been presented in a user-friendly manner. One of my goals was to address the components of SGIF individually. I wanted to demonstrate that the SGIF session in itself is not really a **new** method or technique; rather, that it is a **process** involving a sequence of methods or techniques -- many of which you may already be skilled in. I hoped that by viewing the SGIF from this perspective you would feel capable of using the process without the formal training recommended by Clark (1982) and others.

After reading Bennett's (1987) article, it is clear that practitioners have taken it upon themselves to revise Clark's original process in an effort to suit their particular needs. It has also become evident that there are opposing viewpoints among practitioners -- particulary between Clark and Bennett -- regarding some steps in the SGIF process. Along with my own suggestions and recommendations, I have attempted to present a fair balance of these opposing viewpoints so that you can decide which approaches are consistent with your own views, experiences, and practices. In closing, I encourage you to make note of what works for you as a facilitator and/or instructor and to tailor the SGIF process to suit your needs.

Sample SGIF form Appendix 'A'

SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTIONAL FEEDBACK (SGIF)

INSTRUCTOR _____

FACILITATOR _____

COURSE OR CLASS _____

(1) What do you like about the course?

(2) What do you think needs improvement?

(3) What suggestions do you have for bringing about these improvements?

(4) What are the instructor's major facilitation/ presentation strengths?

(5) What areas of facilitation/presentation need improvement?

(6) What suggestions do you have for making the improvements noted above?

References

Abbott, R.D., Wulff, D. H., Nyquist, J. D., Ropp, V. A., & Hess, G. W. (1990). Satisfaction with processes of collecting student opinions about instruction: The student perspective. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 82*, 201-206.

Bennett, W. E. (1987). Small group instructional diagnosis: A dialogic approach to instructional improvement for tenured faculty. *Journal of Staff, Program, and Organizational Development,5*(3), 100-104.

Bennett, W. E. (1988). *Post-tenure instructional assessment: A process that helps mature faculty maintain and increase instructional effectiveness.* Paper presented at the AACJC Convention. Seattle, WA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 295 711).

Clark, D. J. (1982). The history of SGID development. *SGID Newsletter,1*(1), 2-3.

Clark, D. J., & Redmond, M. V. (1982). Small group instructional diagnosis. *Innovation Abstracts,4*(18), 1-2.

Kort, S. M. (1992). Down from the podium: Preparing faculty for the learner-centered classroom. *New Directions for Community Colleges,79*, 61-71.

Newby, T., Sherman, M., & Coffman, S. J. (1991, April). *Instructional diagnosis: Effective open-ended faculty evaluation.* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association. Chicago, IL. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 334 228).

Redmond, M. V. (1982). *A process of midterm evaluation incorporating small group discussion of a course and its effect on student motivation.* University of Washington. Seattle, WA.(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 217 953).

Weimer, M. (1990). *Improving college teaching: Strategies for developing instructional effectiveness.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wulff, D. H., Staton-Spicer, A. Q., Hess, C. W., & Nyquist, J. D. (1985). The student perspective on evaluating teaching effectiveness. *ACA Bulletin,53*, 39-47.